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CONSUMER EDUCATION FOR MEXICAN-AMERICANS.

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CONSUMER EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES WERE ALWAYS MEANT TO BE AVAILABLE TO ALL INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES. HOWEVER, THOSE WITH THE GREATEST FINANCIAL NEED, INCLUDING MANY MEXICAN AMERICANS, OFTEN RECEIVE THE LEAST AMOUNT OF ASSISTANCE, DUE TO THE LACK OF SKILLED PERSONS TO BREAK THROUGH COMMUNICATION BARRIERS. WHILE PLANNING CONSUMER EDUCATION PROGRAMS, HOME ECONOMISTS HAVE FOUND THAT MEXICAN AMERICANS VALUE THE SAME BASIC THINGS FOR THEIR FAMILY AS DO OTHERS, FOR EXAMPLE, GOOD HEALTH, COMFORTABLE HOMES, ATTRACTIVE AND COMFORTABLE CLOTHING, TIME TO ENJOY FRIENDS AND FAMILY, AND MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEIR CHILDREN. NEW IDEAS AND METHODS FOR PROVIDING CONSUMER EDUCATION FOR MEXICAN AMERICANS ARE EVOLVING FROM THREE PROGRAMS IN TEXAS--(1) THE RESEARCH STUDY IN EL PASO, (2) CONSUMER EDUCATION PROGRAM, COMMUNITY ACTION COMMITTEE, EL PASO, AND (3) FAMILY AND HOME MANAGEMENT COMPONENT, COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM, TARRANT COUNTY. THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF THESE PROGRAMS, FAMILY STABILITY WILL BE ATTAINED BECAUSE OF MORE ADEQUATE CONSUMER COMPETENCE. MORE IMMEDIATE RESULTS COULD BE REALIZED BY EMPLOYING ADDITIONAL HOME ECONOMISTS WHO WOULD BE ABLE TO REACH MORE PEOPLE. THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEXICAN-AMERICANS, AUSTIN, TEXAS, APRIL 25-26, 1968. (ES)

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FOR
MEXICAN-AMERICANS

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CONSUMER EDUCATION

FOR

MEXICAN-AMERICANS

INTRODUCTION

Meanings are in people - not in words, according to various communicators. Therefore, as you note the title, I will be prepared for many different reactions. Partially these will depend on what you know about, and consider important in consumer education for everyone. Part of the interpretation will also be based on your knowledge, experience with, and special concern for consumer education for Mexican-Americans. Need this really be so different from information available to all? If so, why and how? Home economists and others are learning some of the answers, by trial and error and by special research projects that are yielding much valuable information.

Final reports of the Research Study in El Paso conducted from 1962-64 will be released soon by Texas A&M University Agricultural Extension Service. Much of the special material prepared for this research and teaching project by extension home economist subject matter specialists has already been adapted by Home Demonstration Agents and others and used all over the state with different groups. This will be referred to later in this discussion.

The experience of growing up in a German-American community - learning to speak German first, or simultaneously with English, does give me a certain empathy for the feelings of any ethnic group - in the process of acculturation. Brief experience as a high school teacher, then work as a county Home Demonstration Agent in Texas, Colorado, and California made it possible for me to work closely with individuals and families of many different ethnic backgrounds, different age groups and socio-economic levels. More recent extension experience has included supervision of Home Demonstration Agents in the lower eighteen counties of Texas - from Brownsville to Laredo to Eagle Pass, almost to San Antonio and across to Corpus Christi. One-third of the Home Economists employed in this area were of Mexican-American parentage. One is presently serving in a four county area as Home Demonstration Agent at Large. A high percentage of the Mexican-Americans in Texas live in the southern area of the state. Presently, as I work with and supervise student teachers in the Home Economics Education Department of Texas Technological College, I have still another opportunity to observe methods used. A large number of Mexican-American students are enrolled in the Home Economics classes in this area, and have opportunity also to belong to 4-H Clubs in the counties where they live.

Programs in consumer education in the schools, and in the community were always meant to be available to all individuals and families. However, due to the limited number of Home Economists in a community or county, individuals or families most eager or receptive (usually middle socio-economic levels) usually received more assistance. They were easier to reach with limited time and means and were willing to assume leadership roles to help teach others. Many Mexican-Americans are included in this category, as has been shown by reports of classes, workshops, and special interest meetings. However, those with greatest financial need (Anglo or Mexican-American) have often received little help, due to lack of skilled personnel who could devote intensive specialized efforts to break through the communications barriers, which will be discussed here.

In the last ten years much progress has been made by Home Economists and others in adapting subject matter and methods to reach special audiences with consumer information - young homemakers, children and youth, women in the working force, older persons. Much emphasis has also been placed in expanding programs to reach limited income families. Some Mexican-Americans are included in each of these categories, but we realize that many more should be reached with consumer information and trained to assist others who need help.

Most families, and individuals, too, would admit to being plagued with money problems from time to time, so there can be no doubt as to the need of effective programs in consumer education.

"Trends in consumer behavior have caused financial difficulty for thousands of families with incomes high enough for discretionary spending. Living from one pay day to the next with no family financial goals and little knowledge of budgets or money management are characteristic of these families."

Family stability is greatly influenced by these tensions and pressures. "Conflict over money has become a major factor leading to emotional problems, physical ailments and divorces .... The assumption of certain economists that most personal problems could be solved if the income of each couple could be raised sufficiently is not borne out in studies of marital adjustment. Case studies of 78 married women by the Merrill-Palmer School showed that regardless of couples' incomes, they felt it was insufficient. Moreover, as income increased, personal problems seemed to increase geometrically."[1]

Major problems consumers face, according to the above report, include

. Achieving competence to live within income.

. Learning to determine best buys.

. Understanding credit use and costs.

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[1] Texas Extension Home Economics Focus-M.P. 853-Texas Agricultural Extension Service

. Developing an understanding of the market place.

. Ability to evaluate consumer information.

COMMUNICATION IS A COMPLEX PROCESS

Teachers, including parents and friends, generally feel that they strive for two-way communication in the learning process. But this involves skills in verbal as well as non-verbal communication and continuous effort. "Missed signals" or misunderstandings can occur at any stage, as we attempt to create awareness of a need or opportunity in order to develop interest, to encourage trial and evaluation, and finally, to get adoption of an idea or skill.

Home Economists are learning that different methods, or combinations of methods are needed in this diffusion process to get the desired responses or learnings. Apparent also is the fact that repetition in different ways is necessary, since individuals in the group are often at different stages in the learning process, and others simply have not reached the stage of readiness for adoption.

Understanding and accepting the fact that individuals do differ in needs, interests, values, background, etc., is certainly necessary to communication. But a more positive approach, it seems to me, is to build on what is known of the basic wishes, needs, or desires held by all humans, in varying degrees, as a starting point for making more effective use of present methods and subject matter.

Self-understanding is the beginning of tolerance for the ideas and needs of others - whatever their background or culture. If this is not understood, "programs" or "lessons" can unconsciously be built around one's own need or interest, eliminating the joy and respect the learner derives in being involved in the process of planning and discovery.

The need for security is cited often as one of the basic needs of all humans. But what does this word mean to you? - to Mexican-Americans in your audience - individually or collectively? Money? Health? Education? Status? We refer to the need for response or acceptance as basic. Are we creating this setting or atmosphere as we work with individuals and groups? Basic, too, is the need for new experiences in thinking and living. Newspapers and all mass media rely on the word "new" to create at least momentary interest or attention. Are you calling attention to new developments in basic home economics subject matter?

Consumer education programs concerned with foods, clothing, management, housing, home furnishings, equipment, and other areas concerned with family living will have greater appeal and impact if this knowledge is used as a tool for motivation and learning. But we must consider the meanings these words most likely have for our students or listeners in order to create more interesting vital approaches and treatment to the information we have to offer.

The task is a very challenging one - since homemakers and whole families are constantly being bombarded with possible choices, and our message may get lost because of the competition for their time and interest. It may also get lost because we fail to recognize other blocks and barriers which can occur in the communication process. To mention a few more:

- fear - of failure, ridicule, or non-acceptance, of being "different"
- difference in values - personal and/or group
- lack of knowledge of the possibilities involved or the background to insure interest or success
- lack of understanding of the importance, or the why?
- lack of means, to make use of the idea
- lack of skill - no opportunity to practice - again, a fear of failure

OBJECTIVES

In order to continue to expand in-school and out-of-school programs to involve and reach more of our Mexican-American citizens with consumer information, an exchange of ideas by all those now involved in this effort would seem most beneficial. Reports from county extension personnel and others indicate that more of this is being done at the community and county level. Extension County Program Building Committees, whose membership is broadly representative of all socio-economic, ethnic, and age groups, are concerned with the welfare of all families. Resource people working with these committees include representatives of other educational groups, including schools, churches, other agencies, and business people. Some exchange of ideas for coordination and supplementation of effort is provided in this way, but more follow-up is needed in many cases. Limited personnel and pressures for time do not make this possible in many instances.

Doubtless much effort is under way in other states with large Mexican-American populations. Some valuable ideas have been brought to the attention of Texas Extension workers by Home Economists of the Federal Extension service serving on a regional or national basis.

The objectives of this monograph are to:

1. Call attention to the fact that the process of communications, so basic to any program in consumer education or human relations, involves a great deal more than language skills. That we can build on the basic motivations all humans share.

2. Indicate some differences in values that influence the success of consumer education programs.

3. Express appreciation of the Mexican culture and heritage to family life in America.

4. Point out progress that has been made in adapting methods and subject matter to involve more Mexican-American homemakers, families, and youth in consumer education programs.

   - Through intensive work with additional personnel in specific geographic locations.

   - In regular community and county settings.

5. Cite some specifics of promising methods and content of programs.

6. Suggest how programs might be accelerated.

DO VALUES DIFFER?

We are often reminded of the "changing values" of all individuals and families in American society today. Work with individuals and groups of all socio-economic, age and ethnic backgrounds often reveals little conscious awareness of present values and the changes that are subtly taking place - also, few of us like to be cast as a stereotype, preferring to be thought of as individuals.

Mention is made frequently about the difference of values of the Mexican-American and those of the dominant culture, yet few studies exist that point to drastic differences, especially among members of the younger generation. Reports from different areas of the state on responses to consumer education programs by Home Economists involving some Mexican-Americans indicate that effectiveness depends largely on (1) awareness by the target audience that the field is open, or that they are truly included, (2) that the subject matter be based on felt needs or interests, and (3) that the necessary resources for making use of the information or for "reaching the goal" exists.

Mexican-American homemakers, involved in planning groups, questioned directly or indirectly by Extension Home Economists indicate they want the same basic things for their family as do others. Good health, comfortable homes, attractive, comfortable clothing, time to enjoy friends and family, and more opportunities for their children are some of the interests they express. Meanings they have for these words are learned by more personal contact and observation in home visits or conferences.

Family and kinship ties do seem to be stronger - extending to the old and young members of the family, with respect and affection. This characteristic or value of Mexican-Americans we might well duplicate to a greater degree. It means also that, once a "break through" is made to a member of the family with an idea related to consumer education, the influence can be multiplied quickly. However, if this involves a particular skill or means not available to the student or homemaker, there is likely to be polite "withdrawal". Fear of failure seems to exert more of an influence, especially among the women and girls of Mexican-American heritage than those of some other ethnic backgrounds. They must have an opportunity to practice, as well as to be aware of a new idea or skill in order to participate in a group setting. They usually require or seek family approval to a greater degree than the average girl of Anglo background.

In many Mexican-American families the authority structure is still highly traditional. Although the wife exerts a great deal of indirect influence, family authority is vested in the father usually, or in his absence, in the oldest male wage earner. Also, the division of labor or roles of the men in most homes is quite sharply defined. But this too is changing some, as indicated by young couples working to help each other through college, and sharing in job roles in the home as needed.

Various studies point to the new trend developing among Mexican-American youth. They suggest that similar to the characteristics of other minority ethnic groups in the United States, many individuals are beginning to realize, at least to some degree, the ambitions of the youth of the dominant culture in attaining the American dream. There are indications that their concerns are going - or can be motivated to a greater degree to go - beyond their own home and kinship ties to assume leadership and responsibility for making their communities better places for all who live there.[2]

Marriages occur quite early among Mexican-American. Unless girls are enrolled in Home Economics classes in Junior High School or become members of a 4-H Club, they are likely to have little knowledge of time and money management, food and nutrition background and other needed consumer information. Home economists are trying hard to reach more of this audience of young marrieds - in all segments of the population. Since many cannot attend training meetings or workshops, such innovative methods as correspondence courses are being made available by Extension Home Economics specialists and County Home Demonstration Agents. Response is very gratifying for all segments of the population, especially when used in conjunction with television, radio, circular letters, etc.

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[2] Bicultural Youth Survey - Maverick County 1966 (90 percent Mexican-American population, 4-H office, Texas A&M University Agricultural Extension Service.)

PROMISING METHODS AND CONTENTS

Consumer information geared to the needs and interests of specific audiences makes sense. But what methods are proving most effective?

New ideas and combinations of methods are being tried daily by teachers everywhere. The efforts and results reported here will be grouped in two different categories:

1. Intensive work in consumer education by Home Economists working singly or with trained selected bilingual aides, in limited geographic areas, (with high percentages of Mexican-American population.)

   - The Research Study in El Paso, Texas.

   - Consumer Education Program, Community Action Committee, El Paso, Texas.

   - Family and Home Management Component Community Action Program, Tarrant County, Texas (Ft. Worth).

2. Comprehensive consumer education programs available to all.

   - work done by Extension Home Economists, teachers, representatives of other agencies and resource people in Extension Districts 1, 2, 10, 6, and 12[3], including counties with high percentages of Mexican-Americans.

INTENSIVE WORK - The El Paso Research Project

The specific purpose of this study, mentioned in the beginning of this report, was to identify, by means of a controlled research effort, the most effective methods for reaching Mexican-American families with the content of Extension education programs.

The progress report, now available, indicates that the content actually disseminated was in foods and nutrition, clothing, home management, consumer education, and family life education.[4]

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[3] Narrative Monthly Reports of State and County Extension Personnel - Texas A&M University Agricultural Extension Service, College Station, Texas.

[4] Extending Cooperative Extension Education Mexican-American Families Program, Methods, and Evaluation - Texas A&M University Agricultural Extension Service, College Station, Texas

Funds available for conduct of the project were sufficient only to employ one full-time professional staff member. This means that the project had to be confined to one specific locality. Members of the El Paso County Extension Program Building Committee and city and county officials were very interested in the effort, and helped to select an area of the city, where there was a reasonable chance that impact could be measured.

The total area selected contained some 1,700 - 1,800 families. Subsequent to the identification of the area, it was divided into two subareas, Area I and Area II. All teaching efforts were aimed at the audience residing in Area I and none specifically to the families in Area II. Although it was recognized that Area II, being contiguous to Area I, might result in some "spill-over" of information into that area, it was felt necessary to locate these areas together to insure that one population was involved instead of two. Otherwise, any differences achieved could be attributed to inherent differences in the population.

Before efforts were undertaken at carrying out an educational program, two things needed to be known: the characteristics of the population with which we planned to work and just what home economics practices were being utilized by it.

The overall plan was to have two dimensions available for measurement: a time dimension (before and after the conduct of the special educational effort) and a spatial one (Area I and Area II).

In September, 1962, the first Survey was made. This included a 20% random sample of households in both Areas I and II.

Women with a bilingual competency were employed to conduct the interviews with the homemakers included in the sample.

One encouraging and significant discovery was that both Area I and Area II contained the same population - not two different ones. There were no significant differences in such characteristics as educational background, age, size of family, etc., between Area I and II. This was evidence that the sampling techniques had been sound.

One-half of the females and a little over one-third of the male household heads had no schooling above the sixth grade. Many of the elderly household heads had never gone to school or had not gone beyond the fourth grade.

As number of school years completed increased, the percentage of homemakers who could speak and read both Spanish and English increased. Twenty-six homemakers (28%) of the females with from 0 to 4 years of schooling were able to speak and read both languages. This increased to 85 percent for those with 12 years of schooling.

Of the 93 homemakers with from 0 to 4 years of schooling, 11 percent (10) could speak only Spanish and 50 percent (46) could speak and read only Spanish. This was a major barrier to educational development in the area since one-sixth of the population had little, if any, command of the English language and many others had limited command. In the El Paso locality, Spanish was not used on the United States side of the border by mass media; consequently, this limited a very important method of disseminating information to families. In Laredo and farther along the border, however, Spanish programs are very common and response to consumer information via newspaper and radio very good.

Over 200 (69%) of the homemakers said they usually read a daily paper, and an additional 24 (8%) said they read one sometimes. More homemakers read English language newspapers than Spanish language papers. Almost two-thirds of the families had radios in working order, and over four-fifths (84%) had televisions in working order. However, both radio and television stations to which family members listened were about equally divided between El Paso (English) and Juarez, Mexico (Spanish).

The subject-matter content of the educational programs conducted was regarded as incidental to the main purposes of this particular project. Complete, detailed findings of this study will be available later in each of these areas. Only one example - of intensive program on food for good health will be used as an example here.

This program was directed specifically to homemakers in Area I. It was, however, recognized that mass media would reach audiences in both Areas I and II. A variety of methods was used to make it possible to measure the effectiveness of given methods. Consequently, homemakers were asked where or how they had seen or heard about the Food for Fitness Guide. Methods by which homemakers had acquired knowledge in the two areas varied greatly. Letters mailed by the Extension Agent to all homemakers in Area I proved to be the most effective of all methods used. Fifty-one percent of the homemakers in the two areas said they had heard of the Guide.

Food for Fitness Guides were sent in circular letters only to the homemakers interviewed in Area II in the bench-mark study who requested one. No classes were held for homemakers in Area I except as they may have been in the clinic when the agent presented the information. For this group, television reached more homemakers than any other method.

The effectiveness of the letter increased as income increased. Letters were recognized as the source of information by 23 percent of the lowest income class to 59 percent for the highest income class. The second most influential method with the lowest income class was television. Friends and neighbors were a source of information for every income class except the lowest.

Since only one professional was employed in this research project individual contact or counseling home visits had to be limited.

Though little outside publicity was given to the research program, while it was in progress, several special bonuses were soon evident:

1. Subject matter in Home Economics developed by the Extension Home Economists specialists, some translated into Spanish by the professional Home Economist employed, others simplified further and used in English and Spanish in other parts of the state, became available.

2. Leaders in El Paso who had helped to initiate this research project recognized its potential for even more intensive work in consumer education. When the community action group was organized in El Paso in 1966 the county Home Demonstration Agent was asked to serve as a consultant to help identify the living needs of low income families in the city and county, which had been identified in the sample taken in this research. As a result the community action contracted with the agricultural extension service to carry out a home management component as a part of the overall effort to help low income families (largely Mexican-American). Funds permitted the Extension Service to employ two professional home economists (bilingual) and forty paid home management aides, taken from the limited income areas in which they were to work. The educational program was developed around these major concerns:

   - Sanitation in and outside the home.

   - Knowledge of nutrition and meal planning, food preparation, storage of food, use of donated foods and food stamps, buying food, and eating habits.

   - Money management - including the use of credit and budgeting.

   - Housekeeping skills and care of equipment.

   - Clothing, "make over" and repair, and constructions of simple garments, selection and buying, and storage, and personal grooming and care of clothing.

   - Home improvement - storage for food, clothing and household equipment, care of floors, walls, bathrooms, and kitchens. Repair and construction of simple furnishings.

   - Family relations and child development.

The home economics specialists and the two professionals planned and conducted a four-week intensive training program with the aides as soon as they were employed. The training was based on the above objectives. Materials developed by the Federal and State Extension Services for working with limited-income families were used.[5] Aides continued to receive training and counseling from home economists. Subject matter was adapted as needed, based on the experiences of the aides with the families. Records of the visits were kept.

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[5] Training Home Economics Program Assistants to Work With Low Income Families - United States Department of Agriculture Federal Extension Service PA-681.

In this intensive effort most of the teaching was done person-to-person - by aides in teaching home visits. For the very low income families, reports indicated that this is the most effective method, accomplishing several important objectives:

- leadership development and skill in application of subject matter by the aides, as they receive training and work with families.

- additional income for these homemakers - enabling several to obtain permanent jobs.

- opportunity to instill confidence and ambition among the very discouraged - by the aides, as they used simpler materials in the home, indicated empathy and returned often enough to prove that they really meant to help.

Many families visited needed assistance from other groups and agencies and were referred by the aides - helping them to become more aware and confident in the use of community resources.

"Thirty-nine thousand, eight hundred and forty pieces of supporting materials were translated into Spanish and distributed to homemakers."[6]

Reports of aides indicate the following specific changes made by homemakers in improving the home environment:

Food and Nutrition

Better use of dry milk, more vitamin C foods, less expensive cuts of meat, menu planning, more careful buying of food, use of food stamps, more food preparation.

Clothing

Cleaning sewing machines, sewing by hand, remodeling clothing, construction, improved laundering and care of clothes.

Home Improvement

Cleanliness and orderliness, garbage disposal, controlling roaches and rats, painting, repairing furniture and screens, improving storage for food.

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6 Consumer Education Program, El Paso Community Action.

Home Management

Planning menus and making grocery list, keeping records of money spent, planning for spending, use of credit.

Child Care and Family Life

Attitude about welfare and health of their children, immunizations, making toys for children.

Leadership

Homemakers have invited others to their home when aide visits, invited others to group meetings, served as interpreters, teaching others what they have learned.

According to the progress reports made by the Home Economists working with the aides for fourteen months, notable changes can be seen in their personal appearance, grooming and selection of clothes. Visits to their homes show remarkable changes in cleanliness and organization. Much improvement has been made in meal planning and food buying. They report major changes in money management.

Three of the aides have returned to school, one to finish college. She is now available for a teaching position in the public school system. Four have been promoted to Barrio Workers (in charge of neighborhood centers). Another has been employed by Head Start with an increase in salary. Each of these aides give credit to the training they have received as being the major factor in helping them secure positions with more responsibility and better salaries.

The contract was renewed with the Extension Service in the fall of 1967. The educational program will be continued along the same general plan as followed the past year. It is estimated that there is a minimum of 15,000 families in El Paso County with an income of $3,000 or less. Many contacts must be made with each family to bring about changes in family living. The aides will continue to work with families who need help and add additional ones as time will permit.

Based on this experience we are convinced that aides can be trained to do effective teaching with homemakers. Resources can be extended through the use of this method.

Intensive Work--Fort Worth

A similar intensive educational program, with the use of paid aides, was conducted in Ft. Worth, Texas, in Tarrant County - the Home Management component of the community Action Program. Seven of the forty aides trained and supervised by four Extension Associate Home Economists were Mexican-American.

Subject matter used in the El Paso projects was used and adapted, some new materials were also developed to fit this study. Aides working here also kept records of "working home visits" which indicated progress and changes made in consumer practices and family living. An interesting feature of this component was the addition of Industrial Arts aides (men) who helped families do minor repairs - working closely with forty-five Mexican-American families in the area of the project.

Noticeable changes in family living practices such as those listed below were reported by aides.[7]

- Homemaker is shopping from a list prepared before going to the store. The total amount spent for groceries is $5.00 less per week than she was spending.

- She was storing many packaged foods in her oven. We made shelves. The foods are now being stored there.

- Homemaker is serving more vegetables, more main dishes, and foods with vitamin C.

- She makes a list of chores to do - to help her save time.

- Husband is more interested in helping to make the home more comfortable.

COMPREHENSIVE CONSUMER EDUCATION PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO ALL

Obviously the intensive efforts just described, get quicker, more intensive and more measurable results in terms of consumer education programs. However, Home Economists in Extension, in schools and business, operating with volunteer adult or junior leaders, and working closely with many resource people are obtaining some very gratifying results in involving homemakers and youth by other methods. Accurate numbers cannot be quoted on ethnic backgrounds involved, since meetings are open to all.

In areas of the state, however, where a high percentage of the population is Mexican-American, there is a better opportunity to observe the effectiveness of various methods used. Examples following have been taken from the narrative reports of County Home Demonstration Agents, but do show the involvement and coordination of effort with many other professional people and agency representatives.

Involvement in planning consumer education programs -- identifying needs

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges for Home Economists is to involve homemakers and youth in the program planning process itself - to base programs more specifically on real needs and interests, and to develop leadership of committee members as they express ideas, choose priorities, help develop a plan of action, and assume some responsibility for carrying out the program.

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7 Work with Mexican-American families - Home Management Component - Community Action Program - Tarrant County - report by District Home Demonstration Agent, Texas A & M University Extension Service.

Lack of time, a feeling of fear or insecurity in a group situation, and many other blocks operate from time to time to prevent Extension Agents having the broad representation they would like in this important phase of programming. But progress is being made.

"Happiness is having every member of your family living sub-committee, attend," according to Rita Chapa, formerly Home Demonstration Agent in Starr County with headquarters in Rio Grande city. Ninety-eight percent of this group were Mexican-American homemakers who had never before participated in a meeting of this kind.

Mina Valdez, Home Demonstration Agent in Laredo, reported similar response - also from a predominantly Mexican-American audience. In counties with fewer Mexican-American families, representation is more limited, or possibly expressed through parents, ministers, teachers or representatives of the schools, housing, welfare, and health who do have contact with them. Personal visits, preceding important meetings seem to be helpful in getting more understanding and attendance at these meetings. But time for this is limited when only one or a few Home Economists are available.

Consumer Education Available at Regular Organized Group Meetings - Adults and Youth

Home Economics classes, adult homemaking classes, home demonstration clubs and 4-H clubs are open to rural and urban residents alike and provide consumer education in line with the needs identified by the Family Living sub-committee and other advisory groups. Besides the subject matter itself offered in these meetings, much opportunity for leadership development is provided - as members are expected to pass the information along. Records show that many (not enough) Mexican homemakers belong to some of these groups, but usually prefer to speak and think of them as classes, placing a great deal of value on the educational content as a reason for being away from the home and family for several hours.

An example reported by Mina Valdez, of Laredo, shows interest by both men and women in consumer problems: "A consumers' club has been organized in El Cuatro Neighborhood in Laredo. This Neighborhood is one of 13 designated as a target area in the war against poverty in Laredo. This consumers' club was organized by interested persons in the Neighborhood with the help of VISTA's. The club meets monthly to discuss consumer problems and for the presentation of programs on consumer buying.

The County Home Demonstration Agent was asked to present a program on buying food for family meals. An illustrated lecture entitled 'Getting The Most From Your Food Dollar' was presented in the Neighborhood's Community Center.

Information presented included a little on each of the following subjects:

- buying food with sound nutrition in mind
- grocery lists vs. impulse buying

- weekly shopping vs. daily trips to the store
- do-it-yourself or convenience foods
- name brands vs. store brands
- buying snack items
- multiple pricing
- considering storage space
- non-food items and their effect on the food dollar

About 20 women and 15 men were present at this meeting. Interest was very high during all phases of the demonstration-lecture as evidenced by questions and comments made by the audience."

Experience has shown that low income homemakers visited individually by and Extension Agent aide or volunteer leader several times, quite often express interest in having several neighbors come in to "watch a demonstration" or sometimes volunteer to teach others what they have learned. From such small beginnings, groups do evolve that gradually set a framework for more leadership development.

Special Interest Meetings for Consumers

Home Economists have many opportunities to reach specific audiences in special interest meetings, initiated by them, or by serving as a visiting resource person. Many homemakers prefer these shorter meetings on specific problem areas to the organized meetings where officers preside and business is conducted, before the program begins.

The example given below of a meeting with Neighborhood Youth Corps members is taken from a narrative report by Rita Chapa, formerly in Starr County.

"Fifty Neighborhood Youth Corps older teenagers heard the agent speak on the effects of money on family living.

This was the last of a series of educational talks given to this group. The county Neighborhood Youth Corps educational counselor asked the agent to present the talks to the group at their regular two hour weekly educational meeting.

The agent explained such terms as credit, revolving charge accounts, interest, balance, service charge, and interest percentage.

Quality purchases were compared to the quantity purchases that many consumers make. Labels, cleaning instructions, quality construction and fit of garments were emphasized.

The family grocery bill in a low income household is usually very high. High cost items such as "ready to eat" foods - steaks, fresh milk could be replaced by cooked cereals, ground meats, and evaporated or powdered milk.

Medical expenses were also discussed. It was pointed out that folklore and home remedies can make the bills higher in the long run than a visit to the doctor.

A budget plan was suggested and explained to the group since many are already married. The response was well worth the effort - there were lots of questions!"

Workshops Develop Skills and Provide Satisfaction

In-depth methods such as this, take more time for planning but "pay off" in scope and involvement of people. An interesting example, now underway in Hidalgo County, where there is a very high percentage of Mexican-American population is a cooperative effort to help control diabetes reported by Sue Hawthorne County Home Demonstration Agent. State and County Health Department representatives are working with the agent and committee.

In their problem statement they pointed out that 1 out of 7 persons in the United States have diabetes. Approximately 1500 people in Hidalgo County are estimated to have the disease, without their knowledge. Homemakers with this problem have indicated that they do not understand how their diets should be planned with the aid of medication and exercise, to control it.

In planning a workshop this year, the committee hopes to make people aware of the situation, help find new cases of diabetes in the early stages, and aid the patients in managing the situation.

Methods to be used include:

Survey - to be made by home demonstration club members and existing health service personnel including migrant labor. In October (1968), Senior class of all high schools in the county.

Screening program in home demonstration clubs and of participants in Health Department programs.

Small county-wide planning committee to study results of survey and screening program and to plan the presentation of educational programs.

Community educational programs (to be conducted throughout the year) include:

A. Nature of disease - presented by physicians

B. Workshops (5 - 8 people) conducted by dietitians, Extension Agents, Health Department personnel to concentrate on:

Management of diet
Personal hygiene
Travel
Blind diabetics
Testing urine
Premarital counseling

Resource people to be involved in the workshop include three dietitians in the county, local doctors, fifteen health nurses, a health educator and Home Demonstration leaders.

Consumer Education for Migrants

Home Economists are trying to assist migratory families with problems related to consumer education. An innovative method to provide interested leaders with progress material was developed by Mrs. Argen Draper, County Home Demonstration Agent in Deaf Smith County. Concern here was for families located at the labor camp in Hereford, one of the major towns in the county.

The course of study developed was presented to the Ministerial Alliance for interested volunteers to use in working with the labor camp and other families. The outline included basic information on food and nutrition, child care, clothing, money management, home safety and sanitation. The material was adapted also for use with mothers of the children involved in the local Head Start program.

With the help of trained volunteer leaders or aides, much more individual help could have been given these families - in much the same way as the methods used in the intensive programs in El Paso and Fort Worth.

CONCLUSION

Family stability and consumer competence are closely related in our American society. It would certainly seem important not only for Home Economists, but for those working in related fields as well, to make every effort to provide up-to-date information for all, and to adapt materials for specific audiences.

Most immediate results could be attained by employing more Home Economists to train leaders from these audiences - youth as well as adults. This would make it possible, also, to get greater impact in creating awareness, interest, evaluation, and adoption of skills and ideas related to consumer competence. The development of materials for circular letters, radio and television, which are important forces in the awareness and interest stages, requires time and some skill to prepare.

Home Economists in all fields and representatives of other educational agencies and groups concerned with the family, need to mobilize their efforts in assisting Mexican-American families in becoming wise consumers. It has been demonstrated that families can benefit when leaders exchange ideas, supplement and coordinate their efforts.

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